

Today we take full responsibility for our participation in the first political kidnapping in this country --- the kidnapping of Patricia Hearst. We are entering guilty pleas to what the judicial system calls "simple kidnapping" but nothing about our actions today or those of four and half years ago has been simple. So it comes as no surprise to us that our feelings today are complex -- pride in affirming what our actions accomplished and what we learned from them; a very definite pain that 6 of our close friends died, Russ and Joe are in prison and the two of us will be separated from each other by years more in prison; a relief that the uncertainty of the past years is over; and a confidence in our combined strength to continue fighting for the principles we believe in -- the right of all people to control their own lives and to be free no matter what the costs.

We participated in an act which removed Patricia Hearst from her home, her way of life, the people she knew and the privilege which had insulated her from the oppression that so many people suffer. Out of all the lies, distortions, exaggerations that have emanated from the Hearst family in an attempt to fool the public -- one fact alone has been true. Patricia Hearst was kidnapped. She was not brainwashed, beaten, tortured or raped. She was not locked alone in a closet for days and weeks on end. She was not coerced into rejecting her family and remaining with the people who made up the SLA.

She was kidnapped by a group of 8 SLA members. Our politics had various origins -- the prison movement, the anti-war movement, the women's movement -- but all developed at a time when the Nixon White House was attempting to crush all forms of legal dissent thru infiltration, surveillance, murder, break-ins, frame-up criminal charges. The 8 of us along with others in this country responded by translating our beliefs into illegal armed actions as a means to attack power and wealth. We were fully aware of the risks -- death, imprisonment, failure -- but we all felt totally committed to any and all vehicles of change that could propel us closer to uprooting oppression and realizing a free society.

Our actions in 1974 forced the Hearst family to funnel 2 million dollars worth of food into the poor communities of California. The sanctuary of invisibility that the ruling class has so long enjoyed in this country was shattered. The source and extent of the Hearst's wealth was exposed thru the channels of their own media empire and put in brutal contrast to the poverty of millions of people.

At one time Patricia Hearst felt the same pride and self-respect as we did because all three of us saw the events of February 1974 as a coming of age -- a leap in our understanding and growth. But since her arrest, she has never allowed herself the pride of confronting the truth and taking responsibility for actions she made of her own free will. Likewise her family and other members of the ruling class will never take responsibility for the oppression that the very existence of wealth and privilege makes inevitable.

A plea does not represent bowing down to the state. It does not mean that we have been given any favors. We have not offered them anything. We have only made the pragmatic choice of accepting what they offer because, very simply, its the vehicle by which we have gained control over the amount of time we will do in prison -- the means by which we can be back on the streets the soonest.

Being tried on the State's terms according to their distorted sense of justice and fairness, we would have been found guilty of participating in the Hearst kidnapping. But the State's objective was far greater than demonstrating our involvement in that act -- they intended to bury us alive under 13 charges carrying a penalty of life without possibility of parole -- a sentence that's been called the living death. Their objective was not grounded in the acts we were in fact responsible for but rather a desire to see our ideas -- our revolutionary commitment -- locked away for life.

Today we take responsibility for 4 acts which is translated into $4\frac{1}{2}$ more years in prison -- 3 more years beyond our present term. Within $4\frac{1}{2}$ years we'll be back on the streets where we definitely want to be. In this sense we have succeeded in forcing the state to back down.

Our plea today will allow us to speak out on our own terms about the kidnapping of Patricia Hearst -- we will be able to share the truth as we know it about the SLA and Patricia Hearst's involvement. We will be able to openly analyze the accomplishments, the failures, the history, the context from our personal perspective. Many of these facts would have come out in a trial but not on our terms. The arena of the courtroom wrenches events out of context, makes some admissible and some not and covers everything with the fog of unreality that passes for justice.

But why was the state forced to make these concessions to us? First, they had very real fears about the credibility of their key witness -- Patricia Hearst. They could not separate the truth from the lies and they knew we could. They were dealing with the unknown and we had the facts. Second and probably more important, the State has been aligned with the Hearst family all along -- the State with its judicial system is in fact an arm of those who possess wealth and power. We believe the State was forced to back off its objectives in order to protect Patricia Hearst and the Hearst family. In defending ourselves against a sentence of life without possibility of parole, we would have torn apart the web of lies Patricia Hearst has spun ever since her arrest. We would have exposed how the truth of the conditions she lived under after her kidnapping, her relationship to those who had kidnapped her and her feelings about her family all fit together with her decision to remain with the SLA. The humiliating and devastating exposure of the truth would have proved to be a serious setback for the Hearst campaign to get Patricia Hearst released from prison immediately. Also, we would have pursued in the courtroom

family's history of greed, manipulation of public opinion, open advocacy of racism and championing of imperialist aggression throughout the world. We believe the so-called impartial judicial system was forced to negotiate with us because ruling class interests were at stake. Finally, the State "bargained" with us to save the thousands of dollars that our trial would have cost.

We approached this trial with only the power of our revolutionary commitment and we enter our plea today on that basis. This same commitment by the SLA in 1974 forced concessions from the Hearst family in the form of food and access to the media. In 1977 the two of us forced concessions from the courts by using their own judicial system to fight for and win appointment of our own lawyers. Our plea today represents even further concessions on the part of the State. While they are forced to back off the brutal thrust of their objective, they are still in a position to extract a price -- 4½ more years in prison for us. Like anyone, we experience doubts, pain, sadness and loneliness in confronting this but our feelings exist within a pervading sense of strength, knowing that "time" can't destroy the sense of freedom that's within us.

Valuable years of our lives will be defined by the cold reality of separation from each other, our families, our friends; isolation in maximum security (again a penalty for our ideas, not the acts we are convicted of); degradation of being treated as less than human; violence that spreads like a disease from the racist, sexist hatred of reactionary guards and prisoners. For us this will leave permanent scars but it's merely a short term loss while our gains are long term -- the historic accomplishments of the Hearst kidnapping can never be erased and we will return to the streets as two strong individuals still committed to change. Ironically the State has only the short term gain of locking up our bodies while they extract their price. The long term loss will always be theirs because they cannot destroy us or the revolutionary potential of the American people.

-- Emily Harris
Bill Harris

August 31, 1978